

"Sorry," said Jack, "I didn't mean—"

"We're very thankful," the Christmas Pig assured the poem.

Poem smiled.

"No harm done, dears. Suspicion's common sense!

Now come into the parlor—"

They followed Poem into a small sitting room.

"—meet Pretense."

Draped in a seat beside the fire was the strangest Thing Jack had yet seen in the Land of the Lost. In fact, he couldn't make out whether it was a Thing, a person, or a ghost.

He had the shape and look of a teenage boy (though shrunk to the size of Jack and the Christmas Pig), and you could see right through him. Gold medals hung around his neck and he had a lipstick kiss on his cheek; he was dressed like a rock star, with a black leather jacket and pointed boots. When he saw Jack and the Christmas Pig, this strange Thing jumped up and said, "Hi! My friends at my old school called me Rebel. I've got a girlfriend who lives in another town. She's really pretty. We kiss a lot. These are the medals I've won for karate. I could kill you right now with my bare—"

"Now's not the time, Pretense! Please save your lies!" said Poem sternly.

"These Things are running from the Loser's spies!"

Pretense scowled. "You can talk about lying! You're completely made up!"

"Great poems tell the truth—your fibs aren't art!" said Poem in a dignified voice. Turning to Jack and the Christmas Pig she added,

"He can't help lying, but he's good at heart!"

Pretense glowered and kicked the edge of the rug. "I *could* kill someone with my bare hands, if I wanted," he mumbled sulkily. "I *could*."

"Please sit down by the fire, get warm and dry," Poem told Jack and the Christmas Pig, ignoring her housemate.

"And then we'd like to help, Pretense and I."

"This is very kind of you," said the Christmas Pig.

"Yes, it is," said Jack. "Thank you."

He took the armchair nearest the fire and stretched out his freezing hands and feet to the flames. Being made of paper, Poem was staying well away from the fire, but Pretense slumped back down in his chair and said, "Poem told me she'd met you two on one of Addie's walking tours. I *hate* that address book. She's an even bigger liar than I am!"

"Pretense, you never spoke a truer word," said Poem approvingly.

"To hear her talk, you'd think she'd only heard

Of Disposable and Bother-It's-Gone.

Embarrassing, the way she carries on!"

"So there is another town, apart from Disposable and Bother-It's-Gone?" asked Jack.

"Of course! The one beyond the golden door!

Which Addie knows, of that you can be sure.

But Addie likes to think herself a queen—

The most important Thing there's ever been!

And so she tells herself it can't exist,

That wondrous place, the City of the Missed."

Jack and the Christmas Pig exchanged excited looks.

"The City of the Missed, did you say?" asked the Christmas Pig.

"That's right. We know it well, Pretense and I,

For once it was our home—I'm going to cry."

Sure enough, a single tear leaked out of Poem's eyes and made an inky trickle down her page.

"Why aren't you still there?" asked Jack.

Poem moved a little closer to the fire and smoothed herself out to show them the many crossings-out and corrections all over her body.

*"As you can see, I'm just an early draft,
Imperfect trial of my poet's craft!
And when she lost me, oh, her grief and rage!
'I need it back!' she stormed, 'that precious page!'
She swore my loss meant she could write no more!
And so they sent me through the golden door
And put me on a train of royal blue
And treated me with kindness, for they knew
How deeply I was missed—but soon that changed.
My poet tried again, she rearranged
My words, my rhymes, my meter—finally
She knew she'd made a better poem than me.
The Loss Adjusters came and brought me here
Where I'll remain forever, for I fear
I've now become a curiosity,
No longer does my poet cry for me."*

As Poem wiped her inky eyes, Pretense sighed and said, "Poem and I have been friends since we met in the City of the Missed. *My* owner was a teenager. He had to move to a new school, miles away from all his old friends. He felt lonely, and frightened of that bully, Kyle Mason, so he made me. He pretended he could do karate and had a girlfriend and a cool nickname back in his old school . . . but the other teenagers soon

saw through me. He didn't *want* to lose me: he was forced to. Losing me made *him* feel lost, at first. He missed me dreadfully, so I was sent through the golden door in Misland, just like Poem.

"But as time went on, my owner began to miss me less. He slowly realized it was better to tell the truth and have people like him for who he really was. That's when I was Adjusted and sent to Bother-It's-Gone. One day, I daresay, he'll be ashamed he ever had me at all, and when that day comes, I'll be shoved out onto the W—"

"What was that?" said the Christmas Pig, and Pretense fell silent. From a few chalets away came shouts and bangs.

"Uh-oh," said Pretense. "They're searching this street."



THE TUNNEL

We've got to get to the City of the Missed!" said Jack. "Because—"
"Don't tell us *why*, it's safer far that way," said Poem.

"The less we know, the less we can betray."

"Will the train be back soon?" asked the Christmas Pig.

"Not for hours," said Pretense. "Your best chance is to cross the Wastes of the Unlamented on foot, but that's very dangerous. The Loser has his lair in the middle of the Wastes, and he hunts Surplus by night. Of course," he added, perking up, "if I came with you, I could karate chop him to death—"

"Not now, Pretense, they're running out of time," said Poem. Turning to Jack and the Christmas Pig again, she said,

*"You've just one hope: a secret friend of mine,
Though some may call her cracked, she's loyal and brave,
And many are the Things that she's helped save.
For I'll confess, now we're all safe inside,
You're not the only Surplus we've helped hide.
Sometimes, from the Wastes we give Things shelter
They need a break from running helter-skelter!
We've also sometimes helped Things run away,
It's crazy for a hunted Thing to stay
In Bother-It's-Gone, with our horrid mayor,
Who rules by fear and doesn't care what's fair.
And so I urge you both to trust my friend,
For she's a Thing on whom you can depend."*

"When you say your friend's 'cracked'—" began Jack, worried.

"A little mad—but you two need a guide.

Without her you've no chance. Many have tried."

"Then please," said the Christmas Pig as the noises of the Loss Adjusters grew even closer and louder, "introduce us to your friend!"

Poem gestured for Jack and the Christmas Pig to follow her. Pretense jumped up, too, and came after them into Poem's bedroom.

"I could come with you—and I could get my girlfriend to help!"

"Just shift that rug and open the trapdoor," Poem told Pretense sternly.

"Then close it once we've gone. You know the score:

Do your favorite thing when the doorbell rings!

Pretend you've never seen these wanted Things!"

Pretense opened the trapdoor beneath a rug. Poem dropped into the hole beneath—being so light, she couldn't really hurt herself—whereas

Jack and the Christmas Pig climbed down the ladder inside.

"Good luck!" Pretense called after them. "And I *do* have a girlfriend, and she's much prettier than Kyle Mason's!"

The trapdoor banged shut and Jack, the Christmas Pig, and Poem set off along a narrow tunnel that ran steeply downward, leading to the bottom of the mountain they'd climbed earlier on the wooden cart.

"Who made this tunnel, Poem?" asked the Christmas Pig.

"A solid silver spoon, or so Things say," said Poem,

"It happened long ago, before my day.

He thought it quite beneath him, this small town,

And so, by night, he dug and dug, straight down.

The warnings of his friends that fool dismissed,

His only goal: the City of the Missed.

He never understood it's not your cost

That matters in the kingdom of the Lost,

But whether you once touched a human heart,

And how it hurt them when you had to part."

"And did the spoon reach the City of the Missed?" asked Jack hopefully.

"He reached the Wastes of the Unlamented,

Soon, his foolish plan the spoon repented,

A-hunting came the Loser 'cross the plain,

The silver spoon was never seen again."

The threesome continued down the steeply sloping tunnel in silence for a long time, until finally they reached a door in the rock, beside which hung a thick rope.

"Now ring the bell. Old Compass won't be long,

She always heeds the summons of my gong."

The Christmas Pig pulled the rope and a tinkling bell sounded on the other side of the door. After a few minutes, they heard something like a metal wheel turning over rock. The Christmas Pig opened the door a crack and Jack heard a hearty voice say, "More fugitives, eh, Poem?"

"Please help them cross the Wastes, my dear old friend.

Without your aid, they risk a gruesome end."

"Course I'll 'elp, 'course I will!" said the merry voice. "You know 'ow much I loves adventures! Wantin' to go to the City of the Missed, I s'pose? Most Fings want to go there. Well, nicest city, innit?"

"We would like to go there, yes," said the Christmas Pig.

"Well, I can get you to the gates," said the voice, "but I can't get you inside. Will that do?"

"Yes, that's great," said Jack.

He and the Christmas Pig left the dark tunnel and stepped onto the Wastes of the Unlamented, at the foot of the mountain. The snow was falling thicker than ever.

Jack turned back to Poem. "Thank you, Poem."

She leaned down to whisper a final word in Jack's ear.

"The Loser hates the power of Christmas Eve.

He swears, once midnight chimes, you'll never leave."

"What?" said Jack, startled.

But Poem had already closed the door.



Part Five
**THE
WASTES
OF THE
UNLAMENTED**



COMPASS

Compass, who stood balanced on her brass edge, was only half as tall as Jack and the Christmas Pig. Her glass was cracked and instead of pointing north, as it should have done, her pointer was hanging slightly askew.

Jack was so worried by what Poem had just whispered that instead of saying “hello” to her, he turned to the Christmas Pig and said, “Poem says once it’s midnight Up There, I’ll never be able to leave the Land of the Lost!”

“Yeah, I’ve ’eard that rumor, too,” said Compass, before the Christmas Pig could answer. “The Loser finks if ’e can stop you two being found before midnight, ’e’ll get to keep you forever and ever. I don’t know why,

because that's not 'ow it usually works. Lost is lost and found is found, don't matter when any of it 'appens."

But Jack had an awful feeling he knew why the Loser believed this, and he could tell by the expression on the Christmas Pig's face that he did, too. If Christmas Eve was the one night in the year a living boy could get into the Land of the Lost, mightn't it also be the only night when a boy could *return* to the Land of the Living? But as Jack couldn't say any of this out loud without revealing to Compass that he was human, he kept quiet.

"What're your names, then?" Compass asked, looking from one to the other.

"I'm Christmas Pig," said the Christmas Pig, "and this is Pajama Boy. He's an action figure."

"With the power of sleep and dreams," said Jack.

"Hm," sniffed Compass. "Well, you won't be getting much of either tonight. Sleeping's asking for trouble. Off we go, then!"

And without further ado, she rolled off so fast that Jack and the Christmas Pig had to jog to keep up, slipping and sliding over the snowy rubble of the Wastes. Jack's bare feet were soon very sore from running over the sharp, icy stones.

"Now, I've gotta warn you, there's some very strange Fings out 'ere on the Wastes," Compass called back to them. "Some of 'em are nearly as bad as the Loser 'imself!"

"Really?" said Jack nervously.

"Oh, yeah. See, nobody cares these Fings 'ave gone—in fact, some of 'em were lost on purpose, and I can't blame their owners! Some Fings really ain't worth keeping!"

She came to a sudden halt and turned to look at them, frowning.

"Oo's rattling?"

"Oh, that's me," said the Christmas Pig, who'd been clutching his stomach as usual, trying to stop his beans jumping around. "I've got beans in my stomach."

"Well, keep 'em as quiet as possible, won't you?"

"I'll try," said the Christmas Pig, gripping his tummy even harder.

They jogged off again. Compass's metal edge made so much racket rolling over the flinty ground that Jack thought it a bit unfair for her to tell off the Christmas Pig for his tummy beans. As though she'd read his mind, Compass called back to them, "It ain't ideal, being made of brass, because the Loser's got very sharp 'earing, but to tell the truth, I quite enjoy the thrill of it when 'e shows up! Don't worry, though," she added, seeing Jack's frightened glance at the Christmas Pig, "nobody's ever been eaten while they've been with me! I *love* cheating the Loser out of captures. 'E 'ates me, you know."

"How were you lost, Compass?" panted the Christmas Pig.

"Dropped by a backpacker," said Compass cheerfully. "As a matter of fact, that was the second time 'e'd dropped me. The first time, 'e cracked my glass and knocked my needle off its pivot, and I didn't work very well after that, so when 'e lost me again in a jungle, 'e didn't even bother looking for me. Now I'm rusting away at the foot of a banana tree, and I doubt I'll ever be found. 'Oo'd want a broken compass?"

"But you *do* know the way to the City of the Missed?" panted Jack. He already had a stitch in his side, because he was running so fast.

"Oh yeah, don't worry about that," said Compass airily, "although we might zigzag a bit, to keep life interesting. Anyway, I've found new ways of guiding Fings since I arrived on the Wastes. Can you guess what they are?"

"No," said the Christmas Pig, who was hurrying along as fast as his lower trotters could carry him.

"I make up stories with morals and I invent mottos. Would you like to 'ear one of my mottos?"

"Yes, please," panted Jack, because he could tell that was what Compass wanted him to say.

"'Nor' nor' west is all very well, but only the wise go sideways," said Compass proudly.

Jack didn't understand this at all, so he was glad when the Christmas Pig said, "Very true."

"It is, isn't it?" said Compass, sounding pleased. "And I can tell you a story with a moral, if you'd like."

"Oh, yes, please," said the Christmas Pig breathlessly.

"There were once three compasses," said Compass, "a big one, a medium-sized one, and a tiny one. The big one led the way up a mountain, and the medium-sized one steered a boat across the sea, but the tiny one got dropped in a vegetable patch. And the moral of that is, 'never make friends with a radish.'"

Jack and the Christmas Pig both made interested and impressed noises, which seemed to please Compass, and on they ran over snowy rock and loose stones, and the stitch in Jack's side hurt more than ever.

They struggled on through the chilly darkness for what felt like hours. Every so often, Jack or the Christmas Pig would stumble and the other would help him up again. Their sleep inside Lunch Box seemed a very long time ago, but Jack was too frightened to be tired. Every now and then, he'd see shapes looming up in the darkness and worry that they were the Loser, or some of the strange Things Compass had warned them about, but when they got closer, it was always clumps of thistles.

"Where's your blanket?" said the Christmas Pig, noticing Jack shivering in his pajamas.

"I left it in the bin by mistake," panted Jack. "I'm fine."

If only they could get safely across the Wastes without being eaten by the Loser, they'd find DP. The thought of hugging Dur Pig's familiar squishy body and breathing in his friendly smell kept Jack running, in spite of the cold and his sore feet.

Then a horrible moan came echoing across the Wastes.

"Was that the Loser?" gasped Jack in panic. "Is he coming? Should we hide?"

"No," said Compass, still bowling along. "That's a Pain."

"A what?" said Jack.

"A Pain," repeated Compass. "An 'uman Pain. Of course, their owners are delighted to get rid of Pains, so they end up 'ere on the Wastes, roaming around in packs and 'owling. I feel quite sorry for them, really. It can't be much fun being a—"

Compass rolled to a sudden halt again. Two dark shapes had appeared ahead of them, blocking their path.



THE BROKEN ANGEL

The outlines of the shapes looked like a mother and a child to Jack, but he didn't trust his senses anymore and he drew close to the Christmas Pig.

"Oo goes there?" shouted Compass.

"Who're you?" called a frightened lady's voice.

Out of the darkness walked a Christmas angel. One of her wings was badly bent, her plum-and-gold dress was torn, and she was hiding her face behind her left hand. The little blue bunny they'd watched being forced down the chute in Mislaid was leading her along. He was as filthy as ever, his fur clogged with earth.

"Why are you 'iding your face?" Compass asked the angel suspiciously.

"Because you'll run away if I show you," said the angel. "Every Thing I've shown has fled, except for Blue Bunny."

"This is no time for concealment," said Compass sternly. "Ow do I know you're not one of the Loser's spies?"

The angel lowered her hand. Her head was cracked, her face broken. One of her eyes was missing. There was a great puncture hole in her cheek. When she heard Jack gasp, a tear leaked from her remaining eye. She covered her face again and began to cry.

"I know I'm ugly!" she sobbed. "A dog got me!"

But Jack hadn't gasped because he didn't like her face. He'd gasped because he'd just recognized her. That purple-and-gold dress, those chipped curls, those glittery, plastic wings—this was *their* Christmas Angel, the one Gran had chosen, and which Toby-the-dog had eaten. What Jack couldn't understand was why she was down here, in the Land of the Lost, if Toby-the-dog had destroyed her . . .

"Being broken's not reason enough to get sent to the Wastes," said Compass, sounding even more suspicious. "There's plenty of chipped and cracked Things 'oo're so precious their owners won't let 'em out of their sight!"

"I was never precious to the family at all!" said Broken Angel, trying to stem her tears. "I was bought to replace an angel they loved! Bought in a hurry because the shops were crowded—the family didn't like me even when they bought me, I could tell!"

Jack felt horribly guilty. At least the angel had her hand back over her remaining eye, so she couldn't recognize him.

"They put me on the top of the tree, but none of the other decorations were friendly," she sobbed. "They were all mourning the loss of the old

angel, who was their friend and their leader! And then—then—”

“The dog pulled over the tree,” said Jack, without thinking.

“Yes!” gasped Broken Angel in surprise. “How did you know?”

“I guessed,” said Jack quickly.

“The tree fell, and so did I. I got tangled in the branches. The dog tried to drag me out but I was stuck, so he chewed as much of me as he could reach. When the family found the tree knocked down, and saw bits of my dress and my face on the floor, they thought the dog had eaten me, like the old angel. They didn’t notice me hanging upside down at the back. They stood the tree up again and there I am, lost among the branches, out of sight.

“Nobody misses me, nobody cares,” said the angel, starting to weep again. “When they come to throw out the tree, they’ll throw me out, too!”

The Christmas Pig stepped forward and put a trotter on the angel’s shoulder, while the little bunny sadly stroked her remaining hand.

“I’m a Replacement, too,” the Christmas Pig told her. “It might yet be all right. They might find you and fix you!”

“We need to get moving,” said Compass, before the weeping angel could respond. “Tag along if you like,” she added, to the angel and the blue bunny. “There’s safety in numbers, but you’ll need to keep up.”



THE STORY OF THE BLUE BUNNY

And so they ran on. After a while, Jack noticed that the little blue bunny hopping along beside him was gazing up at him in admiration.

"I'm very sorry to stare," said Blue Bunny timidly, "but you're so new and detailed! You must have been expensive! I haven't seen any Thing as fine as you on the Wastes."

The blue bunny was a badly made little toy, with lopsided eyes and arms sewn on at odd angles.

"What are you, if it's not a rude question?" asked the toy now.

"An action figure," said Jack. "Pajama Boy, with the power of sleep and dreams. I've got my own cartoon," he added, because the Christmas Pig was now talking to Broken Angel, so couldn't hear.

"How wonderful," sighed Blue Bunny, his dark eyes shining. "But why are you on the Wastes? Surely your owner's looking for you everywhere?"

"He's very spoiled," said Jack, repeating what the Christmas Pig had told Specs. "He's got lots of toys. He hardly noticed he'd lost us."

"That's awful," said the little bunny sadly. "I never thought a toy like *you* would be so badly treated. The likes of *me* don't expect much, but you're different. Your own cartoon! You're famous!"

"Didn't your owner like you?" asked Jack, because he didn't want more questions about his cartoon. He couldn't really think of any adventures that involved sleeping.

"No," sighed Blue Bunny. "He won me in a raffle at the fair. Every ticket won a prize. My owner wanted the football, but he got me instead. He groaned when they handed me to him, then stuffed me in his pocket and took me home. He never played with me. I lay on a shelf until one day, one of his friends visited. The friend threw me out of the open window into a flower bed, as a joke."

The bunny's voice broke.

"Nobody looked for me. Nobody cared. I lay in the flower bed for weeks. It rained. I was so cold, so wet, but I had no choice but to lie in the mud and wait."

"I don't understand," said Jack.

"I was stuck between two worlds, you see," said Blue Bunny. "It happens sometimes, if it isn't clear whether you've been thrown away or lost. I was stuck, belonging nowhere, frozen and dirty and waiting for my owner to remember me. If he believed me thrown away, I'd cease to

exist. If he thought me lost, I would descend to the Land of the Lost. On Christmas Eve," Blue Bunny went on, "the boy was packing a cuddly toy to take to his grandparents' house and suddenly he remembered that I was lost, but he didn't care or think of looking for me. At that moment, my fate was sealed. I fell straight down here and the Loss Adjusters seized me. They shoved me down the chute that comes out in the middle of the Wastes. I was alone and very frightened, but after a while, I met Broken Angel. We've been wandering the Wastes together ever since. It's been nice to have somebody who understands how I feel. That might sound silly to a Thing like you—"

"No, it doesn't," said Jack. "I had a friend who always understood me, but then I lost him and it ruined everything . . ."

The Christmas Pig glanced back at Jack, an odd expression on his face. Afraid the Christmas Pig was about to tell him off for talking about DP, he changed the subject.

"Perhaps you'll be found by somebody else," Jack told the blue bunny. Through the swirling snow, he could see patches of darkness where no stars shone, which he was sure were openings onto the Land of the Living.

"No, I won't," sighed Blue Bunny. "My body's still in the garden, covered in mud, barely visible. The family's gone away for Christmas. There's nobody to find me now. I belong to the Loser, but Broken Angel and I have agreed to face the end together, and that's some comfort."

Jack felt very sorry and wished he could take the little blue bunny home to his own bedroom, but he was starting to learn the laws of the Land of the Lost and was sure this wouldn't be allowed.

Then, before anyone could say another word, noises exploded out of the darkness around them.

"Danger!" yelled Compass, rolling back to them. "Stick together and brace yourselves! It's the Bad 'Abit gang!"



THE BAD HABITS

Compass, Jack, the Christmas Pig, Broken Angel, and Blue Bunny drew close together, back to back, as a swarm of dark shadows and fiery red dots began to circle them. Voices cackled and there was suddenly a nasty smell of smoke in the air.

“What are they?” asked Jack, very frightened. There seemed to be quite a number of the Things: the fiery red dots looked like eyes, and he could hear cackling and growling.

“I told you: Bad 'Abits!” said Compass. “Watch out, because they often throw—”

Splat! An enormous slimy something hit her.

“What’s that?” squealed Blue Bunny.

"It's a booger!" said Compass furiously, scraping it off herself as she rolled on the spot. "I know that was you, Picker!"

The Things surrounding them howled with laughter and several more giant boogers came flying through the air, while Jack and the others tried to dodge them. *Splat, splat, splat* came the boogers. Then something hard and sharp hit Jack in the face and he yelped in pain.

"What happened?" asked the Christmas Pig.

"They threw something pointy at me," said Jack, looking down at the sharp yellow object shaped like a boomerang. "What is that?"

"A bit of Chewfinger's nail!" said Compass. "*Will you stop it!*" she shouted at the jeering gang surrounding them. "Or the Loser will 'ear us and we'll all be eaten!"

"That you, Compass?" said a raucous voice. "Who're you smuggling this time?"

The Things around them now drew closer. Jack half wished they'd remained hidden. They were even odder than Pretense and a lot scarier.

They all seemed to be bits of humans. Some were mouths: one was loudly chewing gum and others smoking stinking cigarettes, which made the glowing red dots and the nasty smell. There were noses, ears, a single finger, its nail chewed to a bloody stub, several oozing zits that were so disgusting Jack could barely look at them, and a couple of fists, which were pounding the ground in a menacing fashion as though they couldn't wait to start hitting someone.

"Still 'ere, Sugarguzzler?" Compass said to the biggest of the mouths. "You swore you'd be home for Christmas! Your owner didn't want you back, then?"

"Give him time, give him time," said the mouth, revealing blackened stumps of teeth. "There'll be chocolate and sweeties all around him now. He's bound to crack and start scarfing again."

"Hang on a minute," said a strangely familiar voice just behind Jack. "Don't I know you two?"

Jack's heart leapt. Even though he was furious at her, even though she'd thrown DP out of the car window, he'd never been so glad to hear that voice in his life. She belonged to home and the Land of the Living, and in that moment, all Jack could remember was how kind she'd once been, when he felt very small and lost.

"Holly!" he cried, spinning round.

But Holly was nowhere to be seen. Instead, he found himself facing a fist as big as he was.

"This is strange," said the fist, in Holly's voice.

"What is, Bullyboss?" asked a giant ear, in a sly voice. It slid closer. "I *love* hearing strange things."

"I'm down here because I chucked a toy pig like him out of a car window," said Bullyboss, in Holly's voice. "And you look a bit familiar, too . . ."

"He's an action figure!" said the Christmas Pig quickly. "Pajama Boy, with the power of sleep and dreams!"

"He's got his own cartoon!" piped up Blue Bunny.

The Bad Habits jeered.

"I bet it's rubbish," said Sugarguzzler.

"No wonder they don't care he's lost," sneered Picked Zit.

"Fine talk from you!" said the Christmas Pig. "Your owners were *glad* to get rid of you!"

"My owner will be back for me any moment," growled Bullyboss. "I'm her mate, I am. She needs me."

"Why does she need you?" asked Jack.